Good afternoon and thanks for joining us I am Judy Simpson. This is known as the giving season and for Vermont’s nonprofits it’s a key time of year to raise money. The money donated to Vermont nonprofits sector reaches every community in our state. It helps provide critical services to the less fortunate. Donated dollars also help support Vermont’s environment culture and community development. But as we know that down the economy has made it a tough few years for nonprofits trying to raise funds. And on top of the economic problems we now have Irene. Family and community needs have skyrocketed and many of the nonprofits themselves suffer damage. Not surprisingly folks have turned to the Vermont community foundation to help with recovery efforts. To 25 years the foundation has been working to connect donors with opportunities to make a difference in Vermont. That expertise has been invaluable in developing strategies for both short and long-term response. This afternoon I want to welcome the president and CEO of the Vermont community foundation Stewart Comstock Gay. We've asked Stuart to be with us to share his perspective an offer some things to think about this giving season. Thanks for coming in.

Stuart.: My pleasure.

Judy.: It's great to see you again. Let's start out with a brief overview of the Vermont community foundation when it is and what it does?

Stuart.: Sure Vermont community foundation is one of over 700 community foundations in the country. We are placed based foundation and what we are is a collection of charitable funds philanthropists all over the state rather than creating private foundations pool their money to work toward issues in Vermont whether its child care the environment or the arts. We distribute grants we work with donors we put about $17,000,000 a year into the community in Vermont in investments and grants every year.

Judy.: We talked last fall about reports from the community foundation on Vermont’s nonprofit sector. There were some alarm bells in that report. It showed an increase in demand for nonprofit service but it also showed a decrease in support for the nonprofits. Where are we now?
Stuart.: The demand is even higher and the support is still flat. The nonprofit sector has been saying the shrinking a Federal gov't shrinking of state gov't and with the tough economy all over demand is only hire this year than it was last year and we knew that was coming as well. It is a particularly difficult time particularly for human service organizations.

Judy.: We should mention that of course like everything else in Vermont the foundation's work was deeply affected by Irene. But was a light at the foundation and those first few weeks?

Stuart.: It was all hands on deck from the first moment when people showed up we were fortunate only a few people on our staff were directly affected by the flood so we could really get to work and start helping people right away. The phones were ringing right away from donors a saint where can we get money that will be most helpful. We were calling people all across the state with whom we've worked weather in the cap agencies or the united way or the Red Cross saying what are you doing what do you need how can we help get it to you. We helped getting money out to organizations very quickly and started providing some sense of information for people very quickly.

Judy.: I think that was really important because I think that was everybody's reaction even people who are affected by the flooding would say yet my basements flooded but my neighbor hasn't much worse than that and everybody wanted to know how to give.

Stuart.: How can I help? It's one of the tough things and I think we've done very well in the state and I'm not just saying us I'm saying everybody involved in having very good organizations and having organizations delivering services fairly and relatively quickly. These things are difficult but people have been doing it quickly. The challenge has been how do you get information out about how to do it and where to do it whether it's through volunteering or giving. We've tried to play a role particularly around and giving side of that.

Judy.: How has the role changed in the weeks and months passed Irene as far as what you've been doing?

Stuart.: One of the things we looked at as we got into this was who is already providing really good work and where are there some gaps that we might want to step in. The couple gaps we identified one of them was with the department of agriculture creating this fund for farmers where we've raised at this point over two million dollars that's going directly out to farmers. We have another big round of grants going out before the end of the year and that is something nobody else was in a particular position to do that work and because of our partnership with the department of ag we could make that happen. The the second one was on grants to nonprofits that would directly affected so we work with that and continue to provide grants to nonprofits in towns. The third one is there ended up being a lot of benefits as we know whether it's the fish concert bloom in group event in New York City and we were able to work with those folks to help them direct money from all over the country into the different funds of the state.

Judy.: I think that was a big question too. This money is coming and so how does it get where needs to go?
Stuart.: Yes and a guest to different places. With our farm fund and we have an application procedure where the farmers apply they do that through our web site and then we have a committee with the department of agriculture rolled Lamont and the number of other organizations we review them and put those grants out from the day the deadline we're making those grants within two weeks each time so it's a pretty quick turnaround on those things. With money in the long-term relief fund that process is still being set up that is not a fund that we hold but we tried to partner with them. And that money will be going out largely through local committees it's starting very soon. Each one has a different method for people looking for support and I'm sure you've talked about this over and over. You always start with FEMA and get your materials in there and it goes from there.

Judy.: Let's talk a little bit about the farm disaster relief fund. How did that come about and why because that's a pretty unique issue that farmers face.

Stuart.: It's a unique issue. One of the things that is so clear I will start with this. Vermont's farming has such a huge national identity as well as a state identity so it allowed that to be something where people are crossed the country could say I want to support that part of Vermont. It was a fund to create that was going to bring in support from out of the state and it certainly has done that but what happened was we have been working with the department of agriculture on food and farm issues for few years and when this moment came up and they asked who could help put this fund together who could work with us they call this up and said cady do this and we said of course this is such a big issue. It was this partnership not only with the department of egg but as I say with rural Vermont with the UVM cooperative extension and any number of other agencies to say look let's get all the agriculture organization's the statewide AG organizations together to get this money out to farmers. I think as a partnership that bodes well for the future and I think that the fact we've been all able to turn it around pretty quickly has been a good thing.

Judy.: What are some of the other Irene response efforts that the community foundation is involved in?

Stuart.: As I said we're also involved in this nonprofit fund. We have a modest sized fund where we are making grants out to nonprofit organizations that were either affected themselves or have exceedingly great demand because of the flood. Brattleboro boys and girls club is one that we talk about. We did a grant of a lost a whole bunch of facilities there. We did some day Care Centers some housing organizations that have higher demand and need more counselors to help people. Those are grants that we've been able to turn around pretty quickly. Then one of the other ones that has been a very exciting partnership is a project that was initiated by lieutenant governor Phil Scott which is to help take apart mobile homes that were destroyed. These are people who this is low income housing this is affordable housing for people and these homes get destroyed and what it does to people is it becomes a very hard to lift them out of the situation. Through this relatively modest help we can help work with the general contractors with a CVOEO rough Vermont organization for equal opportunity. Lieutenant governor's office funding from Aubuchon and various other folks can come together since a will pay for the destruction of those homes say you can start looking forward rather than backward. That's been a terribly rewarding enterprise and at this point it seems like we're halfway through getting those homes taken away.

Judy.: In the mist of all this year also marking the community foundations 25th anniversary.
Stuart.: 25 years ago we said the flood hit and it's a nice thing these people started this 25 years ago so we were in a position today to be responsive and to provide assistance. We are relatively young and community foundation terms but were pretty strong community foundation. Increasingly involved in a wide range of issues and while we're not as big as our fellow community foundations in places like Cleveland Chicago or San Francisco we think we're doing pretty well here and able to put a lot of money into the communities. We did have a big celebration planned but that got flooded out. Bread loaf was inaccessible on the day of our annual meeting.

Judy.: We're going to take a look at a short video from the foundation's new imagine what's possible series. What's the idea behind the video?

Stuart.: The idea was to both celebrate people who had done the work to create this foundation but even more to celebrate the idea that giving really matters in community. We tried to make it not so much about us but a lot more about giving and contributing and participating in community and that's what makes community strong.

Judy.: OK let's take a look at imagine what's possible.

Philanthropy it's kind of hard to say.
Philanthropy.
Philanthropy.
I think philanthropy is a big word. I think generosity is what we're talking about. I think people are very generous.
You don't have a lot of money that doesn't make any difference the help is given too.
People who have experience should help other people who don't have experience.
There's a lot of opportunities to get involved and really make a difference in your community.
One of the things that you're passionate about and then find a way to support those things.
I see a lot of littering on the streets and it's very good that we have cleanup day.
We do care tremendous relief for the natural environment and we care about how it grows
In the future.
There's so many challenges in the world in this country in the state in our communities it's so easy. You have got to have hope.
I would like to see our community in 25 years where we would all have the system of helping each other.
The most important thing left to do is to preserve this culture of giving.
At the end of all of this I want to feel like I did my part. It only takes one or two determined people to change the world.
My hope for the future is that everyone in Vermont can find a shared vision.
I learned that when someone helps you you can learn something from that and if you're learning something you can help someone else.
Some people need food some people need water to be healthy.
One of the things I do to help people make a big difference.
I feel like I'm doing a good thing to help people.
I want to help people when I get older.
Giving brings people closer together.
It just makes me feel good.
Philanthropy is important because it's helping people.
I think anybody could be a philanthropist they're healthy.
We can change the things that are not working. We can do better.

Judy.: Once again that's part of the video series from the Vermont community foundation and I'm talking with the foundation's president what are the some of your perspectives of travel across a state after Irene and some of the things you seen and how have the needs changed?

Stuart.: The first thing that I was say from traveling around the state is connectedness the community mindedness the caring the volunteering spirit of Vermonters is just huge. We've heard from people at FEMA and other places saying we're just amazed at how strong the state is. They say you guys do right. You guys know how to the community minded and get engaged and that's the most encouraging thing. The second thing is the sense of people who were affected by the flood and their sense that community supported them was really important in getting us the first stages. Now we're at a place where people have been with this for a few months and for some of us we say it's not affecting us and we're starting to forget about it. The people who were deeply affected they're still in the mists of it. They're still trying to get their homes repaired their businesses back up. Making sure the roads are passable which they are by and large but even so these are challenges. You go down into Wilmington and that place is really still in a very difficult place trying to get their businesses back up and going. I think there's a sense of frustration and a sense that the same time of OK we're going to dig in and keep going because there's no other way to get through this. I sense that they don't want people to forget them and they want people to remember that while things are going and things are open we still have some serious challengers.

Judy.: We started the program talking about the giving season. What advice do you want to leave our viewers with as far as digging a little deeper and help out still?

Stuart.: Tough economic times. The gov't isn't able to provide the same support it used to. We have Irene but we also have all the other issues still before us. I would say to people who can find a way to give a little bit more. Worry giving a little bit more personally and my house this year because we know that need is great and weekend if we work hard to find a way to get additional resources. Take care of your neighbors look out for neighbors it something Vermonters do but let's keep remembering that and if you're not volunteering somewhere already maybe it's time to get started with that too because it's a whole fabric of supports and the community that matter.

Judy.: It also starts a traditionally sought in the video of children talking about wanting to help people. That is really a tradition you want to start?

Stuart.: Absolutely. People who give as adults are people who learn to give as kids. It's very rare for somebody who never side giving in their family to start it when they are an adult. So it's important to build that tradition when folks are young.

Judy.: How can someone contribute or volunteer we’re just find out more about the Vermont community foundation.

Stuart.: VermontCF.org is the best place to start. Around the flood relief VT flood response.org. If you're looking to give look at the United Way look and other organizations out there there are great ones doing work.
Judy.: That's our program for today thank you so much for joining me.

Stuart.: Thank you.

Judy.: We will see you again next time on across the fence.

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